United Nations CRC/C/SR.1943

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
27 January 2015

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child
Sixty-eighth session

Summary record of the 1943rd (Chamber A) meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 15 January 2015, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Sandberg

Contents

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined second and third periodic reports of the Gambia (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Editing Section, room E.5108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.15-00552 (E) 200115 270115

1500552

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined second and third periodic reports of the Gambia (continued) (CRC/C/GMB/2-3; CRC/C/GMB/Q/2-3 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of the Gambia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia), replying to questions asked at the 1941st meeting, said that the child helpline was functional. Although some telephone companies were charging for calls made to the helpline, negotiations were under way to ensure that it was toll free. Half of all calls came from the police and other partner institutions and most were made before 8 p.m.

3. **The Chairperson** asked whether that meant that the helpline did not operate at night. Who answered the calls?

4. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) replied that the helpline was run out of the children's shelter by a team of social workers. Nurses and other trained shelter staff were available to answer any calls at night.

5. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** (Country Rapporteur) asked whether helpline staff were adequately trained and what procedures were followed in answering calls.

6. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that helpline procedures were governed by a protocol and forms had to be completed. The staff were qualified social workers and regular skills upgrading was provided.

7. **The Chairperson** asked whether the public, and especially children, knew about the shelter and the helpline.

8. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the helpline was advertised in various forms, such as leaflets, stickers and billboards.

9. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** asked whether there was only one shelter and, if so, how fast a child in need could be reached.

10. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) replied that the shelter kept contact information on several key partners in all regions, so the response time was quite fast. In reply to another question, she said that the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority had registered all video clubs and was drafting relevant regulations.

11. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** asked what body was responsible for ensuring that programmes broadcast on prime time television were age appropriate.

12. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure was fully aware of the need for child-sensitive programming and that all films that were aired on national channels were censored for inappropriate content.

13. **Ms. Jeng** (Gambia) said that corporal punishment was not used in prisons. Its use in schools was governed by disciplinary procedures but was not prohibited by law. It was not banned in the family either, and efforts on that front focused on advocacy.

14. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the Children's Act was due for review.

15. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** asked when the review would take place.

16. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) replied that the authorities were working with consultants on a strategic plan, which was expected to be completed by mid-2015, in time to be taken into account in the budget for the next fiscal year.

17. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff**, noting that more emphasis appeared to be placed on awareness-raising than on introducing a total ban on corporal punishment, asked whether the State party was considering such a ban.

18. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the focus on awareness-raising was an interim measure until a prohibition on corporal punishment could be discussed during the review of the Children's Act. In cases where a child suffered grave bodily harm, reflected in visible marks and injuries, the corporal punishment was characterized as assault and was reported to the police. Furthermore, child protection focal points had been appointed in health-care facilities to detect possible cases of ill-treatment.

19. **The Chairperson**, noting a lack of information in the report on alternative forms of discipline, asked whether awareness-raising efforts included the teaching of parenting skills.

20. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that a parenting manual had been designed and that child-rearing advice was broadcast on television and radio programmes. An advisory committee had been set up pursuant to the Domestic Violence Act, which met on a regular basis. Although no countrywide survey of domestic violence had been conducted, studies were planned to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon in Gambia. The one-stop centre on gender-based violence was part of a network of Government entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It was based at the main hospital in Banjul, but the intention was to expand it to regional health-care centres. Regarding the student protests quelled in April 2000, she said that the Government had covered the cost of treatment for any injured minors, including those whose condition had required treatment abroad.

21. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff**, emphasizing the fact that, according to her information, children had died in the incident, asked whether anyone had been brought to justice.

22. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that she had no specific information about the ages of those killed.

23. **The Chairperson** asked what was the budget for the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act.

24. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the advisory committee had been meeting for only six months and was in the process of setting up the requisite systems. The aforementioned shelter was State-run and there were plans to open another one to serve more rural areas in the near future.

25. **The Chairperson** asked what the shelter's capacity was and whether it was sufficient to meet demand.

26. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the shelter's current capacity was sufficient but that there was room for expansion. The President had directed that women's and children's affairs should no longer be combined under a single ministry; however, the establishment of the department of children's affairs was delayed for budgetary reasons.

27. **The Chairperson** asked what the time frame was for setting up the department of children's affairs and whether 2016 might be a feasible deadline. She also wished to know how activities relating to children were being coordinated in the meantime.

28. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) replied that it was hoped to establish the department in 2016, although that was contingent on the availability of resources. Government programmes on children's issues in various domains were currently run by the relevant department or ministry.

29. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** asked whether stakeholders and civil society had been consulted regarding the establishment of the new department.

30. **The Chairperson**, drawing the delegation's attention to reports that existing bodies responsible for children's affairs were underresourced, asked whether the new department would be allocated the resources needed to fulfil its mandate.

31. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia), acknowledging a shortage of financial resources and capacity, said that better training for social workers was being fast-tracked and that a capacity assessment of the Department of Social Welfare had been carried out to identify requirements. Moreover, there was a clear political will, beginning with the President himself, to promote children's rights and well-being, and the Government was reaching out to its bilateral partners for technical assistance. The authorities worked closely with a number of international organizations, particularly UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Programme; however, there was some frustration that United Nations agencies in the Gambia were not coordinating their efforts and had rather inadequate resources themselves.

32. **Mr. Samateh** (Gambia) said that the role of the Gambia Bureau of Statistics was to coordinate the data-collection efforts of the various ministries and departments. Most data other than census data were gathered through ad hoc studies. The report on the most recent demographic and health survey, conducted in 2013, had been finalized but was awaiting Cabinet authorization for publication. The Bureau, after consultations with all key players, and with the support of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the World Bank, was nearing completion of a national strategy for the development of statistics. One of the innovations under the strategy would be to hold an annual dialogue between the producers and users of statistics. The Bureau's data were available to NGOs and the public via its website and the national database GamInfo.

33. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** asked whether GamInfo was actually functioning.

34. **Mr. Samateh** (Gambia) said that it was and that it was maintained by trained staff. The lack of data on migration was explained by the fact that they were collected primarily through the census every 10 years. Moreover, census data on migration were very limited and needed to be supplemented by further studies. Funding permitting, a migration survey was to be conducted in 2015. The high rate of child mortality affecting the least educated women was not a phenomenon unique to Gambia.

35. **The Chairperson** said that, although she agreed with that statement, the Government nevertheless had a responsibility to reduce the gap. She asked what steps were being taken in that regard.

36. **Mr. Samateh** (Gambia) said that, on account of the patriarchal structure of society, most families prioritized the education of their sons over that of their daughters, which partly explained the prevalence of early marriage. However, the Government had adopted measures to reduce the practice, in particular through the introduction of free, compulsory basic education.

37. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the Ministry of Health was reinforcing primary health-care services as a means of reducing infant mortality.

38. **Mr. Samateh** (Gambia) said that, according to census data, the number of child marriages was declining, partly as a result of the Government's decision to introduce free and compulsory basic education.

39. **The Chairperson** asked whether the delegation could provide statistics on child marriage from the 2003 and 2013 censuses.

40. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that figures could be sent to the Committee at a later date. Given the high rate of illiteracy in the Gambia, it would be preferable not to rely on census

data and instead conduct in-depth studies and analyses of the incidence and impact of child marriage and female genital mutilation in the country.

41. **The Chairperson**, in reference to the health-care system, asked whether efforts had been made to reach out to mothers.

42. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that a community-based model had been adopted, allowing citizens to have a say in the management of services in their area.

43. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff**, enquiring about the role of the NGOs Affairs Agency, asked what kind of support the State party gave to NGOs.

44. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the Agency, which had been placed under the authority of the Office of the President, was tasked with providing assistance and coordinating the registration and activities of NGOs at the local level. The Government enjoyed a cordial relationship with NGOs, which benefited from tax relief and grants and were invited to join government delegations in international forums.

45. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** said that the delegation should provide further information on the 2014 amendment to the Criminal Code establishing the offence of aggravated homosexuality, which carried a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and was likely to encourage the stigmatization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.

46. **Ms. Herczog** (Country Rapporteur) said that, contrary to previous assertions, there had been reports of NGOs in the Gambia facing difficulties and struggling to operate freely, not least because they were dependent on government funding.

47. She wished to know whether attitudes towards polygamy were changing and what steps were being taken to combat the practice. She also asked how the State party intended to implement systematic family support strategies to reduce poverty, what programmes were in place to prevent baby dumping, how the Government viewed contraception and sex education, and what action was taken in the event of unwanted or rape-induced pregnancies.

48. With regard to the foster care scheme mentioned in paragraph 128 of the State party report (CRC/C/GMB/2-3), she asked who was in charge of making and supervising adoption arrangements, how the views of children were established in the absence of a complaints mechanism, whether prospective foster parents received payment as an incentive, and whether the scheme was in compliance with international legal standards for foster care. The delegation should also explain why a large number of children who were not orphans were living in alternative care settings, what entity supervised placements in such settings and what care was given to children who suffered abuse or neglect at the hands of their parents. She asked how many parents had been accused and convicted of abuse, who determined whether complaints were genuine and what steps were taken to rehabilitate victims and perpetrators.

49. Noting that abandoned babies could not be put up for adoption, she requested additional information on those children who were adopted. Did the State party intend to ratify the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption and, in the meantime, how were the requirements of the Convention taken into account in national policy?

50. She wished to know how the Government could ensure that fathers fulfilled their parental responsibilities and what had been done to alter public perceptions of their role in childcare. She also asked how the State party planned to strengthen community-based childcare and increase the number of foster parents. Given that the National Orphan and Vulnerable Children Task Force was no longer operating, the delegation should indicate who was responsible for coordinating and enhancing the child protection system. The

delegation should also provide statistics on the abandonment and out-of-home placement of *almudos* or *talibés* and children with disabilities, and information on policies to increase the school enrolment rate of such children.

51. Regarding corporal punishment, she asked whether the training given to teachers and social workers was designed to eliminate the practice in all settings. She wished to know whether there was a plan to provide better training to health-care workers in order to increase their capacity to support women and children, and a strategy to ensure the effective distribution of micronutrients to reduce malnutrition. The delegation should also describe any measures taken to prevent malaria-related diseases.

52. Turning to education, she asked whether the Government intended to raise the school-leaving age, which had been set at 12. As the legal working age was 16, the delegation should explain what happened to children in the intervening period. She also wished to know whether there were plans to provide free secondary-level education, and what was being done to improve access to education for children in remote areas and to prevent children under 16 from working, even if only in family businesses.

53. While welcoming the ambitious provisions of the Children's Act with regard to the enjoyment of sport and cultural activities, she wished to know how the Government could ensure that schools were suitably equipped and that out-of-school activities were organized.

54. She asked what measures were being taken to prevent children spending time on the streets and what services were available for poor and deprived children, particularly those who had resorted to begging in the past. She also asked how the Government could be sure that its child crime statistics were accurate, and what steps had been taken to identify inappropriate behaviour and offer alternatives to sentencing.

55. The delegation should describe any efforts made to guarantee the well-being of unaccompanied minors and indicate what follow-up was given to reunification procedures to ensure that children were not exploited. Lastly, she asked what measures were in place to tackle corruption and end the culture of impunity that allegedly surrounded the practice.

56. **Ms. Khazova** enquired about the prospects for developing and expanding the juvenile justice system. She invited the delegation to evaluate the progress of judicial reform in the Gambia and elaborate on the training received by judges.

57. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** requested data on children held in prison with their mothers and asked whether efforts were made to facilitate visits for children living outside prison. She also asked what support was offered to children whose parents were on death row, and whether the best interests of the child were taken into account in prison settings. As to adolescent health, the delegation should indicate whether HIV-related services went beyond mere advocacy and prevention and included appropriate treatment.

The meeting was suspended at 4.25 p.m. and resumed at 4.50 p.m.

58. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the 2014 amendment to the Criminal Code, establishing the offence of aggravated homosexuality, had not marked a shift in the Government's stance on homosexuality, which was a sensitive issue in the social sphere. The Government's focus was on nurturing traditional values and customs and transmitting them to children.

59. **Ms. Herczog** asked whether steps were being taken to alter public perceptions and traditional practices, as had been done in the case of female genital mutilation and child marriage. She also encouraged the State party to reform its Criminal Code, as the inclusion of a provision on aggravated homosexuality sent a clear message to the community.

60. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that, although attitudes were changing, the process took time. Homosexuality was a particularly thorny issue in countries such as the Gambia, where

Islam was the majority religion. The Government would continue to promote positive traditions and values, and was wary of undoing recent progress in the field of children's rights.

61. In response to a concern expressed by Ms. Herczog, she said that clear guidelines had been established for NGOs, whose reports and registration were handled by an independent board. They were not subject to censorship.

62. **Ms. Herczog** asked the delegation to comment on reports that NGO representatives had been subjected to death threats, harassment, intimidation and deprivation of liberty.

63. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the Department of Social Welfare, which worked closely with NGOs, had not received any complaints. To her knowledge, no children's rights organizations had encountered difficulties in dealing with the Government. For those working on sensitive issues such as children's rights, death threats were normal, and she herself had been threatened in the past.

64. Better education and economic prospects were contributing to a gradual decline in polygamy, with many young people preferring to have smaller families. Nevertheless, most polygamous families were tightly knit, particularly in rural areas, and the practice rarely led to conflict.

65. The Government was working on a systematic family support strategy and planned to extend existing measures, such as cash transfers. Overall, the social protection system required further strengthening and coordination.

66. With regard to abandonment, a study was needed to assess the situation and dispel the notion that baby dumping was an issue that only affected teenage mothers. Teenage pregnancy was a topic that had been discussed in youth forums and great strides had been made in terms of advocacy and education. Family planning was freely available in health-care facilities. Although abortion was illegal, families were encouraged to provide support in the event of unwanted pregnancies and efforts were being made to help reintegrate girls whose families had disowned them as a matter of honour.

67. Domestic legislation did not provide for abortion in cases of rape, but did permit doctors to terminate pregnancies when the lives of both mother and baby were at risk. Victims of rape had access to prophylactics and other forms of support. The Government acknowledged that there were gaps in the Children's Act and would work to address them.

68. Turning to the issue of fostering and adoption, she said that there were two systems in place in the Gambia. The first system focused on infants handed over by their parents to specific individuals. Such individuals were assessed and the babies were placed with them for three years, with a view to adoption. If need be, the foster parents were provided with financial support and training in parenting skills. Social workers carried out regular visits and prepared periodic reports that were shared with the Children's Court. Should the police fail to trace the biological mother within the above-mentioned three-year period, the Children's Court duly processed the adoption. In the case of infants abandoned in the street, a list of appropriate potential foster families had been drawn up. The second system involved the placement, with members of their extended family, of children in conflict with their biological parents.

69. **Ms. Khazova** asked whether children could be placed with another foster family if a fostering placement had been found to be unsatisfactory.

70. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that such action could be taken.

71. **Ms. Khazova** asked whether the placement of children with members of their extended family constituted a form of informal adoption.

72. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that such placements were carried out following the assessment of the members of the extended family in question and were a form of kinship fostering that was formalized through a court order.

73. **Ms. Herczog** asked why the probationary period in respect of abandoned infants was so lengthy.

74. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the three-year period was stipulated in the Children's Act; there had been cases where biological mothers had been traced before the expiry of that period.

75. **Ms. Herczog** asked whether the child was returned to the biological mother in such cases.

76. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that such cases were dealt with by the courts and the police because it was a criminal offence to abandon a child.

77. **The Chairperson** asked whether the child's best interests and the issue of continuity of care were taken into account in such cases.

78. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the authorities were guided by the principle of the best interests of the child.

79. **Ms. Khazova** asked whether, in cases where, following the reappearance of the biological mother of an abandoned child, the courts had ruled that the child concerned should remain with his or her foster family, the child in question could access information on his or her biological parents.

80. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that, if the child in question had reached an age at which he or she could understand the issues involved, access to such information would be granted.

81. **The Chairperson** asked whether biological mothers left their children in the care of members of their extended family or with other persons without a court order.

82. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that that practice was quite common but that it did not involve children at risk who had been brought to the attention of the authorities.

83. **The Chairperson** asked whether there was a review procedure in place regarding the formal placement of children mistreated by their biological parents.

84. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that there was a procedure in place involving court orders, reporting and review periods.

85. **The Chairperson** asked whether there was an adequate number of trained social workers to carry out the various procedures that had been mentioned.

86. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that a capacity assessment had been undertaken and an action plan was being prepared on capacity strengthening, the training of additional social workers and training in specialized skills.

87. **The Chairperson** asked whether children placed in alternative care had access to complaints mechanisms.

88. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that infants placed with foster families were monitored by social workers during the three-year probationary period. Children placed by the courts with members of their extended family could contact their social workers if they needed to make a complaint.

89. Children were not held in prison with their mothers in the Gambia. In some cases, women prisoners who had been pregnant at the time of their imprisonment but had been unaware of their condition had been released following childbirth.

90. **Ms. Herczog** asked what was being done to encourage breastfeeding in general and exclusive breastfeeding for infants up to the age of 6 months in particular. She also asked about the situation of children of prisoners, particularly with regard to placement arrangements.

91. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that, under the Women's Act 2010, pregnant working women were entitled to six months' paid maternity leave. A campaign promoting breastfeeding had been launched and the number of breastfeeding mothers was rising. Children whose parents were in prison could visit them on a regular basis. In addition, educational sponsorship could be provided in such cases. The children of imprisoned single mothers were placed with members of the extended family.

92. **Ms. Herczog** asked whether women working in the private sector were also entitled to maternity leave and whether support was provided for breastfeeding mothers affected by HIV/AIDS.

93. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that women working in the private sector had the same right as others to six months' paid maternity leave. Breastfeeding mothers affected by HIV/AIDS were supplied with nutritional supplements.

94. Fathers who failed to fulfil their parental responsibilities could be brought before the Children's Court or the *Cadi* courts.

95. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** pointed out that it could be difficult for women to claim child maintenance and that the civil courts tended to award higher amounts of maintenance to women than the *Cadi* courts.

96. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that *Cadi* court officials had been retrained in order to tackle that issue. Koranic schools (*majalis*) received State funding. *Talibés* currently studied English, mathematics and science, in addition to the Koran, and no longer begged on the streets.

97. Replying to other questions that had been raised, she said that education was both free and compulsory in the Gambia up to, but not including, senior secondary level. The corporal punishment of children in alternative and institutional care was prohibited under recently introduced minimum standards. However, there was a need for legislation to ensure compliance in that regard. As to the improvement of health provision, all citizens in the State party currently lived within 3 kilometres of the nearest medical facility.

98. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** asked the delegation to comment on the frequent shortage of medical supplies and drugs, poor sanitation and the lack of access to safe drinking water.

99. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the situation in terms of medical supplies and drugs had improved. The vast majority of families had access to safe drinking water in their homes and work was ongoing to improve the conditions of sanitation.

100. **The Chairperson** drew the attention to the need for information about families that did not have access to safe drinking water in their homes.

101. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that such families had access to safe drinking water provided through community standpipes.

102. **The Chairperson**, reverting to the issue of education, asked what was being done to ensure that there were enough teaching staff and to tackle the issue of hidden costs related to education, such as books and uniforms.

103. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the State paid examination fees and had made available funds for the improvement of school facilities. Impoverished parents were eligible to receive support from the authorities to enable them to buy school uniforms for their children, and textbooks were provided free of charge.

104. Replying to a question from **the Chairperson** about the issue of transportation for schoolchildren, she said that most children lived within walking distance of their schools and those who did not were taken to school in donkey carts paid for by the authorities.

105. **The Chairperson** asked what was being done to improve the quality of both teaching and teaching staff. She further asked to what extent the education system covered rural areas and whether disparities remained between urban and rural areas in terms of quality of and access to education.

106. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the Gambia Teacher Training College was involved in efforts to improve the quality of teaching and teaching staff. Furthermore, incentives had been introduced to encourage teachers to take up posts in rural areas and retired head teachers had been drafted in to monitor the quality of teaching.

107. With regard to early childhood development, she drew the Committee's attention to paragraph 57 of the Gambia's replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/GMB/Q/2-3/Add.1).

108. **The Chairperson** asked whether there were sufficient trained teachers to implement the early childhood development policy.

109. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the Gambia Teacher Training College was currently training a large number of such teachers. On the issue of programmes for juvenile offenders, she said that the latter were taught to read and write and received counselling and assistance regarding reintegration into school.

110. **The Chairperson** asked the delegation to comment on the low level of school enrolment for children with disabilities.

111. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that a programme to integrate children with minor disabilities into mainstream education was in place and a large number of teachers had been trained to assist such students. There were some special schools for children with severe disabilities in the Banjul area. Families of children with severe mental disabilities in urban areas benefited from respite care support and buses had been provided to transport such children between their homes, the respite care centre and the special schools.

112. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff**, reverting to the issue of juvenile justice, said that the delegation should comment on the lack of separate detention facilities for minors of both sexes and for minors and adults. She also asked about the limited use of legal aid and the low level of public awareness regarding the existence of such aid. Lastly, she had been informed that police, judicial officials and social workers had not received sufficient training on the provisions of the Children's Act and on international standards regarding the administration of juvenile justice.

113. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that social workers, police and prison officials received training on the Children's Act and on international principles concerning juvenile justice on an annual basis, and a forum had been set up within which those issues were discussed. A procedure on the processing of detainees that complied with international standards had been implemented and disseminated to all relevant stakeholders. A steering committee on juvenile justice met on a monthly basis and any cases requiring review were referred to the Chief Justice.

114. Turning to the issue of legal aid, she said that a representative of the National Agency for Legal Aid attended every sitting of the Children's Court and such representatives accompanied social workers on their weekly visits to the juvenile wings of detention facilities. There were plans to build a detention facility exclusively for minors of both sexes but girl offenders were currently placed in children's shelters. Significant progress had been made regarding the introduction of non-custodial sentences for minors.

115. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** said that she wished to know how many lawyers accepted legal aid cases in the State party.

116. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that a number of organizations and individuals provided free legal aid.

117. **The Chairperson** observed that the National Agency for Legal Aid had only limited resources.

118. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that the Agency's transportation resources were limited but that a project was being implemented with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide regular legal clinics.

119. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** asked if statistics were available on the number of children involved in the juvenile justice system.

120. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said the number of such children was very low.

121. **Ms. Khazova** asked whether legal aid was granted for both civil and criminal cases.

122. **Ms. Secka** (Gambia) said that legal aid was made available for both types of cases.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.